

Forever Girlfriends

“Friendship is a sheltering tree.”

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Susan Josephs

Essay Writing

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Slip-sliding on snow pack - barreling down Rabbit Ears Pass - with flurries flying, Beth's BMW did a three-sixty. Ending up on the opposite side of the road, we sat there laughing.

The car episode was a perfect metaphor for the life changes we were making. We'd done a three-sixty but were headed in the right direction.

In 1969, having just divorced our husbands, Beth at 31, and I at 23, were starting new chapters. The Steamboat Springs ski trip was the perfect metaphor for our brand-new freedom. Laughter eased our fear of the unknown.

I'm getting ahead of myself.

Beth Shaw and I first met on November 22, 1963, the day John F. Kennedy died. It was a cataclysmic day for everyone. Friends huddled in Beth and Mike's home, trying to digest the consequences. Betty Stirling was 26. I, Susan Rammacca, was 18. Our names have changed but our friendship never has.

Our first husbands were drinking buddies (one of the reasons we divorced them) and we found ourselves traveling in their inebriated crowd. As a sophomore, 2000 miles from an overbearing, mentally ill, Sicilian father, I couldn't distinguish between interesting and insane. Yet, Beth seemed like the stable one in a room of crazies.

Remembrances become elusive after 55 years. Emotional connections weave our cloth even if the details fade.

Some of the memories are too good to forget.

There was the Mexico extravaganza. In January 1964, my not-yet first husband, Gil dropped out of grad school and I out of undergrad. We headed to San Blas, the idyllic beach town on Mexico's west coast. Beth and her husband Mike, and two friends joined us during Spring Break. Our rented house was too small; we found a bigger one, closer to town. The place wasn't exactly a palace. We took turns *not* sleeping on the double bed. The bed had iron springs. The "mattress" was a giant piece of cardboard.

In the morning the guys went off to drink fresh-squeezed orange juice (so they said) leaving us to tidy up the house. Beth and I swept, straightened, and washed dishes while drinking eggnog that reminded us of the holiday liquid found in grocery stores. After several days we realized we were laughing a lot more than usual. We read the label. Our morning sustenance's ingredients had somehow escaped us. Rompope was laden with rum.

Carefree days were spent sunning, reading books on the beach, drinking from coconuts, and dining on sea turtle in a little open-air restaurant on the town square. Beth, Mike, Johnny, and Rock returned to Boulder. We abandoned paradise and went to California when Gil got a draft notice. Marrying gave Gil a 1-Y status and kept him from Vietnam.

When Gil and I finally returned to Boulder, in 1966, Beth and Mike had built a mountain house at Gross Reservoir. The surrounding beauty and Beth's emanated nurturance made me feel protected enough to take the mysterious, mind-altering substance LSD there. Her calm ensured the vivid otherworldly experiences I was

having were not to be feared. I attribute my pleasant “trip” to Beth’s placid assurances.

We remarried, Beth to Evans in 1971, and me to Michael in 1972, making *much* better choices. While our paths took us in different directions, our shared life transitions kept a durable thread between us. We lost day-to-day connections but managed to visit in New York City or Boulder. My move back to Colorado, in 2013, has allowed our friendship to redouble as we both move into our last life chapter.

I love Beth’s easy-going nature. Her laughter defuses any situation no matter how intense.

We’re more discerning now as time shortens. In 2016 we participated in an Intergenerational Writing pilot, meeting intriguing people and making life-long connections with our millennial partners. Beth has always had a zest for adventure and travel. At 81, she went to Sri Lanka with a bunch of millennials. She’s a terrific cook. We love the arts, reading, and entertaining at home. Beth’s a nurturer, tending her garden and giving her time to meaningful causes.

Our shared experiences and endurance place a stable carpet under us as life circumstances continue to change. I’m grateful for our laughter, our deep friendship, and her wise counsel.

Laughing together is still easing the unknown.